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SUBJECT: LATVIA: JANUARY 13 PROTESTS FIZZLE

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¶1. The widely anticipated January 13 rally fizzled yesterday as only about 30 demonstrators and nearly an equal crowd of journalists showed up at the head office of Parex Bank to protest the government's economic policies. January 13 marked the first anniversary of a violent protest on that date in 2009 that shocked local politicians and external analysts. The 2010 demonstration was observed by several dozen police, who were deployed as a precautionary measure. The protestors lacked a clearly articulated message and there was no repetition of the violence witnessed in ¶2009.

¶2. The main rally was organized by a small group called "Antiglobalists" and included several protesters holding posters that said, "Give us jobs not taxes," reflecting the general public disenchantment with the country's economic situation. The protesters mostly spoke out against Parex Bank's continuing bailout. Protesters interviewed by television expressed a wide range of grievances. The Interior Minister, Linda Murniece, who arrived to witness the protest, concluded that the participants and organizers lacked a clear rationale for their demonstration and said police resources had been wasted. Murniece's predecessor was criticized last year for the inadequate police response to the demonstrations.

¶3. Andris Orols, the leader of the "Antiglobalists" group, admitted he was disappointed that the protest drew such a small number of people. The Chief of the State Police, Valdis Voina, admitted that even the police expected more people to show up. Voina noted that none of the more radical movements participated in the demonstration. As a result of the weak turnout, "Antiglobalists" are calling for another protest on January 23, this time near the residence of the former president of Parex Bank, Valerijs Kargins.